

Associational Sermon.

The Observance of Gospel Ordinances.

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"Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you."—1 Cor. xi. 2.

Christ has a visible kingdom on earth. He set it up, in the days of his flesh, out of the materials which John, the forerunner, had prepared. And while He was with it, he was the head and source of all its laws and government, but when about to depart He prepared for the execution of those laws by giving it executive authority, and intrusting it with all His laws, and ordinances, whereby it was to be known and continue to extend His reign until He should come again and receive the kingdom to himself. The laws and ordinances which Christ gave, are all laid down in the scripture, and we are required to observe them all, and no more the ordinances are baptism and the Lord's supper, the former being the initiatory into the kingdom, and the latter the commemoration of the sufferings and death of its great Head and Founder—Christ. Having several times assembled his disciples, He gave them the title of assembly, or church.

It was by this title that he designated them when he said, "I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And He used the same appellation when he delivered the fundamental law for dealing with all personal offences among the members of the kingdom or churches when He says, "If he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church, but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

The kingdom then went forth, as Christ's executive, observing the directions which He had given. But, as the kingdom extended it became necessary to form executives, or churches, to execute the divine will among the children of men. So long as they observed the divine instructions, as commanded, each organization was like the pattern, both in faith and practice.

But by and by heresy began to creep in, some departed from the faith, and then commenced the conflict between those who claimed the right to change the ordinances of God's house, and those who have always endeavored to adhere strictly to the command, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Hence there has been a fierce and prolonged war all along the line, ever since the apostasy.

This cruel crusade started with the idea that the kingdom of Christ is a legislative body, and that, as such, it has the authority not only to institute new laws and ordinances for the government and practice of the churches, but also to coerce the consciences of men. But our text goes back of all these departures and feuds, to the days of inspiration, and furnishes divine authority concerning the necessity of literal obedience in the observance of divine ordinances. Let us now notice more particularly some thoughts concerning the observance of gospel ordinances:

First—That the word of God is the only and sufficient rule of the faith and practice of pure Christianity, and therefore that the kingdom—or Churches of Christ are not legislative bodies. By legislative bodies I mean bodies having divine authority to change the instructions which Christ has given concerning his kingdom, or to enact new laws and ordinances for the observance of Christian churches. I presume that it will not be denied that Christ possessed the right to give the laws and ordinances which he thought desirable. Hence, if that right is now possessed by others they must have received it of the Lord, and it is only reasonable that they who profess to have this power should produce their authority. In the absence of such evidence we have no

right to believe that God ever invested human beings with such power.

To say the least, it is a very dangerous thing to allow such beings as we are to have such unlimited privileges.

The consequences of the assumption of which began to develop from the very first days of the apostasy, and are now seen wherever there is a departure from the teaching of scripture, if God had invested either individuals or churches with such authority, then they are authorized to exercise it, but not without. And as this authority can come only through the Word of God it is their duty to point out the chapter and verse where it is to be found, and it should be considered rather a privilege than a hardship.

But we unhesitatingly state that such unlimited authority over divine institutions is nowhere to be found in the word of God. Again there are some who, thinking to avoid such an egregious error, and yet retain the seemingly coveted power, by claiming that "the church has the power to change those things which are non-essential." Of whom, it is asked, "What are the non-essentials?" "Non-essential means not necessary." Shall we say that Christ has commanded the observance of commands which are not necessary? This is to charge God with folly. We shudder at the thought which inculcates such disastrous conclusions. Shall sinful man subject the gospel to his own caprice? And, granting this claim, who is to decide between what is essential and what is not? Or, are all at liberty to disregard whatever is contrary to their tastes or convenience? This may do for those who seek presbyters rather than truth. But the scriptures nowhere inculcate the principle that personal convenience is of more importance, and just as acceptable to God, as obedience to divine commands. Hence, the assertion of the right, to disannul the ordinances of God's house, is just as destitute of divine authority as that of the former. Indeed, it amounts to the same thing. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." But we are not left to conjecture concerning the sufficiency of the scriptures as a perfect rule of faith and order. Because the scriptures themselves claim to set forth the whole of God's will concerning His creatures. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim., 3: 16, 17.) This doctrine is corroborated by a multitude of scripture expressions. See 1 Pet. i. 21; Acts i. 16; iii. 21; John x. 35; Luke xvi. 29-31; Rom. iii. 1, 2; 2 Sam. xxiii. 2; Psa. cxix. 111. To which might be added a host of inspired statements, all of which bear upon this fact. But we shall, for brevity's sake, condense our remarks concerning this point, and simply say that God gave the scriptures with view to the complete salvation of men; they contain the whole counsel of God, without any mixture of error; it is by them that we are to be judged; and they are the true standard of Christianity, by which our conduct, creeds and opinions must now be tried. All of which statements can be amply demonstrated by the word of God.

Are we not prohibited from adding to or taking from God's will concerning us? If the putting a hand to the ark was so sacrilegious that the Lord smote the offender, is it less profane to lay hands upon the ark of the better covenant? Hear what God said to His ancient people: "Now therefore hearken O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments which I teach you, to do them; that ye may live and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." And, when they changed these laws, Christ rebuked them for making void the divine law by their tradition. Not a word do they utter concerning any right, possessed by them, to change these institutions. Now, is God's word less authoritative under the new than it was under the old dispensation? Has He given us rights, concerning the changing of His

statutes, which His ancient people did not possess? If so let it be pointed out.

Let us now pursue a little further the plain statement of the New Testament, concerning Christ as being the only lawgiver of His people. Christ warned his disciples against false doctrines, and admonished them to beware of all those who would seek to institute new practices. He said: "Be not ye called Rabbi, for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your Father upon the earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called Masters, for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." I think that these words may be legitimately claimed as teaching that no man should assume authority to change the laws or ordinances of Christ's house. They teach—as plain as words can—that no human being has authority or "power over men's consciences, in matters of faith and obedience," but that they who would lead Christ's hosts should do so "according to the word of God," and not according to their own pre-conceived notions. We are required to teach men to obey the ordinances of Christ, and not to invent or prescribe ordinances of our own.

The apostle declares that Christ is the only law-giver. He says: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." James rebukes those who presumed to prescribe a law for the government of their brethren, and does so on the ground that their prescription interfered with the divine prerogative. His words are: "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?"

By which we are taught that as God the Father gave the law to the people of Israel; so the Lord Jesus Christ—who is King in Zion, and the only lawgiver of His Churches—has given commandments and laws for the government of His people. And, that as God's ancient people were strictly required to yield obedience to the divine laws, so are we required to be exact in our obedience to the laws and institutions which Christ has given. With such plain declarations of holy writ before us, what must be thought of the teachings, which assert that, "The institutions and practices of the New Testament did well enough for the times in which they were given, but we need something new and different, for these days."

I cannot help regarding such language as an impeachment of the wisdom and goodness of God, and as being very little less than blasphemy! It implies that Christ lacked either the wisdom or the goodness to make proper arrangements for the government of His people, and that He has authorized and required poor sinful and ignorant men to supply the deficiency. Only think of it! A professed worshipper of Christ exalting himself above his maker! Was it not of such persons that Jesus spake when he said: "Whosoever exalt himself shall be abased?" Can an intelligent christian say, "We have a better way?" What inglorious pride! May God forgive such inexcusable arrogance! Having now seen that the scripture is the only correct rule of the faith and practice of pure Christianity, and therefore the kingdom or churches of Christ are not legislative bodies, (i.e. have no authority to change the laws and institutions which Christ has given, nor make new ones.) We proceed to consider the next thought:

Second—The relationship which exists between the churches and the word of God, or some of the evidence that the laws and ordinances have been given to the churches as executive bodies.

It is generally understood that all who descend from the "Church of Rome" profess to receive the scripture as the only standard of appeal. But,

when we come to reduce this principle to practice, we find some who think that the churches are authorized to arrange things so as to accommodate the opinions and convenience of men.

We must not, therefore, base our faith upon concessions, however plausible they may seem to be. And especially so when those concessions are like the shifting sand. Believing, as we do, that the holy scripture was given as a perfect rule of faith and conduct, we regard any departure therefrom as not only a forsaking of the truth, as it is in Christ, but also an offence against God!

Now let us hear the divine testimony concerning Christ being the only law-giver in Zion, and the consequent duty of executing His laws. When Christ was with the disciples, on the mount of transfiguration, "A bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.'" Christ is hereby declared to be the prophet, priest and king of his people; and they are required to submit to his ordinances, as unto the King of saints. He is to be heard always, and in all things! Again, when Jesus rebuked the Jews for not observing his doctrines, he said: "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

This is a very plain statement concerning the importance of being governed by the teaching of Christ. It shows that Christ regards all human institutions, which are intended to compete with the divine, no matter how much pretended sanctity or religion they may be attended with, as vain empty things, and devoid of that element which alone can constitute them acceptable to God. They are consequently of no real use, profit or advantage to those who observe them. Christ says further: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the words that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself: but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." These words set forth both the authority of Christ's commands and the terrible consequences of rejecting them. He declares plainly that they who reject Him reject God, and that whatever men may substitute in the place of his requirements they must be judged by what he has commanded. Is it not sufficient for us to know that God will require an account of the manner in which we have treated His commandments?

The teachings of the apostolic writings also go to establish our position.

Paul says: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet please men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man, For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Gal. i. 6-12. "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to (human) ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the sanctifying of the flesh."

These expressions are so explicit as not to need any note or comment.

Conclusion next week.

Two Christian converts only were known in China about forty years ago, now about twenty thousand are the number counted.

An effort made for the happiness of others lifts us above ourselves.

Sunday Reading.

The Danger of Halting.

What is it you are wavering between? Dust and ashes, and a crown of glory that fadeth not away." On your right hand is Christ, heaven, and so immortality of blessedness; on your left hand is disobedience, rebellion, discontent, remorse, despair, and misery. Between these you are halting! While you halt the "gulf" is forming that will soon be "fixed"; the character is deepening that will soon be stereotyped forever. Indecision becomes decision; you decide for hell while you waver about heaven. And how eminent the peril of those that are wavering! It is now, or it is never; it is nowhere. The door will soon be shut that can never be opened, and the dark abyss set that can never be crossed. O! that I could bring home to every halting man the position that, as a sinner, without Christ, he occupies!

Some will remember a touching tale mentioned in one of the little periodicals published for the laboring classes. It was published some years ago. It narrates how a poor man, on one of the rocky coasts of our country, that got his bread by gathering sea fowls' eggs, went out one morning on his perilous adventure, and looking down a terrific steep, he saw midway a ledge abutting from the rock, covered with a cluster of the sea-fowls' nests. He fastened his rope to a tree above the cliff, and lowered himself down till he trod upon the ledge. In his eagerness to grasp the spoil, he unwittingly dropped the noose of the rope by which he had descended and it swung, as it appeared, far beyond his reach; and there he stood on that narrow ledge, above him a fearful height he had no hope to scale, below him a terrific precipice with the sea dashing at its base. It was a moment of unutterable anguish. In intensity of dismay, by a desperate effort, he sprang upward. It pleased God he should grasp the rope. He drew himself up to the summit, trembling with transport and terror. Every one of us can realize the peril of that fellow creature. But how akin to this, but intensely more awful, the condition of every waverer! He stands on the narrow ledge of life; above him is the terrific mountain of his guilt that he has no power in himself to scale below him is the fearful abyss of death; There is but the breath in his nostrils between him and the bottomless pit. O, awake fellow sinner; awake to thy true and perilous position! It is late, but not too late. There is yet the hope that hangs from the cross of Jesus, or rather from the throne of God; that hope can lift thee over the thicket of thy guilt, and land thee on the brink of the shore of eternal safety and peace. O leap and live! "Fly for refuge, and lay hold of the hope set before you," and as God liveth your soul shall live! He is "slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." "As I live," said the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should repent and live. Turn ye, turn ye; for why will ye die?"

Realizing God's Promises.

A dying saint recently said, "They are to me no longer promises; they are realities. I experience their meaning." Then she added, with the least possible sign that it was a quotation:

"Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, My beauty are, and glorious dress."

The failure to experience the pardon of guilt, and to realize the new birth and the "sufficient grace," is the most common cause of skepticism as to Christ's expiation, the Spirit's regenerating grace and faith's victory. Some accuse ministers and theologians of "preaching a mere theory of the atonement," and insisting on its acceptance as a condition of salvation. Possibly some do that. But it is not a theory so much as an experience that all truly successful missionaries, evangelists, and pastors have insisted on; a theory, indeed, sufficiently defined to appeal to the understanding and to the heart; a theory that is large enough to hold in its fulness and meekness the Scripture language:—"He loved me, and gave himself for me." "My body broken my blood shed for you." "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "His blood cleanseth from all sin." My grace is sufficient for thee."

To feel one's guilt and desperate need and then to apprehend the nature and personal application of the divine promises—this is the spiritual preparation by which the soul appropriates Christ's work to itself and becomes one with him.

Theological defections, as they are called, often find their root in defective experiences: How can unforgiveness know the sweetness of pardon. Still less can unfelt and unrepented guilt appreciate love in sacrifice. This is the simple story of many a saved soul.

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm, On thy kind arms I fall, Be thou my strength and righteousness, My Jesus and my all."

Help for us all.

So here is comfort and help for us all. Every Christian has at least a little strength. No matter how obscure his place; no matter how at present his work may seem unrecognized; let him be true to his chance for work, and by divine law he is bound to rise, and the world shall one day be conscious of his work. The influence of the small and the obscure workers has contributed more to the power of Christianity than any other. The teachings of pious parents, the seemingly unrecognized labors of Sunday-school teachers, the efforts of the many private city missionaries whose names go down to the grave unrecorded, the lives and words of tens of thousands of country ministers whom the great world never hears of, but who toil on faithful to their opportunities,—all such work has passed through the open door; the world has been made purer and brighter by these toilers' utilized strength; and in the face of this influence, ever spreading, and deepening, no man can shut the door.

The Legal Length of a Lecture.

Archibald Forbes describes, in the *May Century*, how he came to be sued by a Welsh local agent for breaking an engagement to lecture. The lecturer had only an hour and a half to devote to the audience, owing to the necessity of catching a train for London. As the agent insisted on a preliminary speech of introduction, etc., Mr. Forbes refused to lecture, and was nearly mobbed at the depot. The case was tried, with the following result:

His contention was that he was acting in the interests of the Newport people in prohibiting the curtailment of the lecture. Mine was that the lecture hour was eight, and that my lecture was only an hour and a half long; when the proceedings were protracted it was because of unpunctuality and other people's oratory. In proof of my assertion I offered to read my lecture to the court, but the jury visibly shuddered, and the judge said life was too short for this kind of evidence. However, he summed up in my favor, and the jury followed his lead; so that I won my only law suit. The plaintiff appealed to a higher court in London, and the case came on before Lord Coleridge, who made very short work of the matter.

"It is acknowledged," said he, "by the defendant that his lecture is an hour and a half long, and it seems the plaintiff wanted it longer. Now I hold, he continued, 'that any lecture is a common nuisance that lasts longer than an hour, and so I dismiss the appeal!'"

The smallest Church in England.

Westdale, a little parish in England, has the smallest church in that country and it is a very diminutive affair. It has but eight pews, and yet is capable of accommodating double the population of the district. The rector opens the church himself and rings the bell. Then he dons his ecclesiastical robes in the presence of his congregation. There is no musical instrument in the church, and the minister leads the singing. His sermons are very short—a recent one occupying only seven and a half minutes in its delivery. Two services are held every Sunday, and this rector, clerk, precentor, sexton, bell-ringer, and church-warden, all combined in one, receives for the performance of his varied duties the modest little salary of about \$300.

Concerning Collections.

Paul lays down many useful principles "concerning collections." (See 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2) These were to be: 1. *Individual*: "Let every one of you." A member of a Church sometimes says: "We do so much for charity! We spend so much for missions," etc. We do it. Yet the individual so boasting does nothing. There is no obtaining pardon in common. "Every one" must repent, believe, and be saved. So "every one" aid is doing good. 2. *Proportional*: "As God has prospered him." The giving should be in a suitable ratio to the getting. If more can be spent on ourselves, more laid by, so more should be given to God;